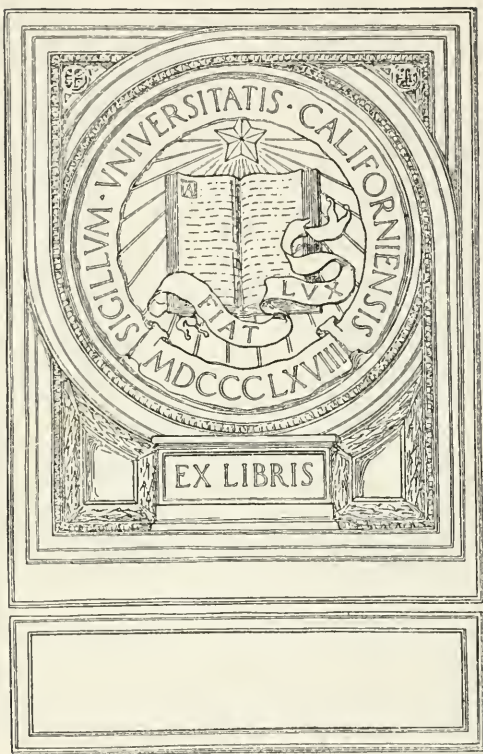
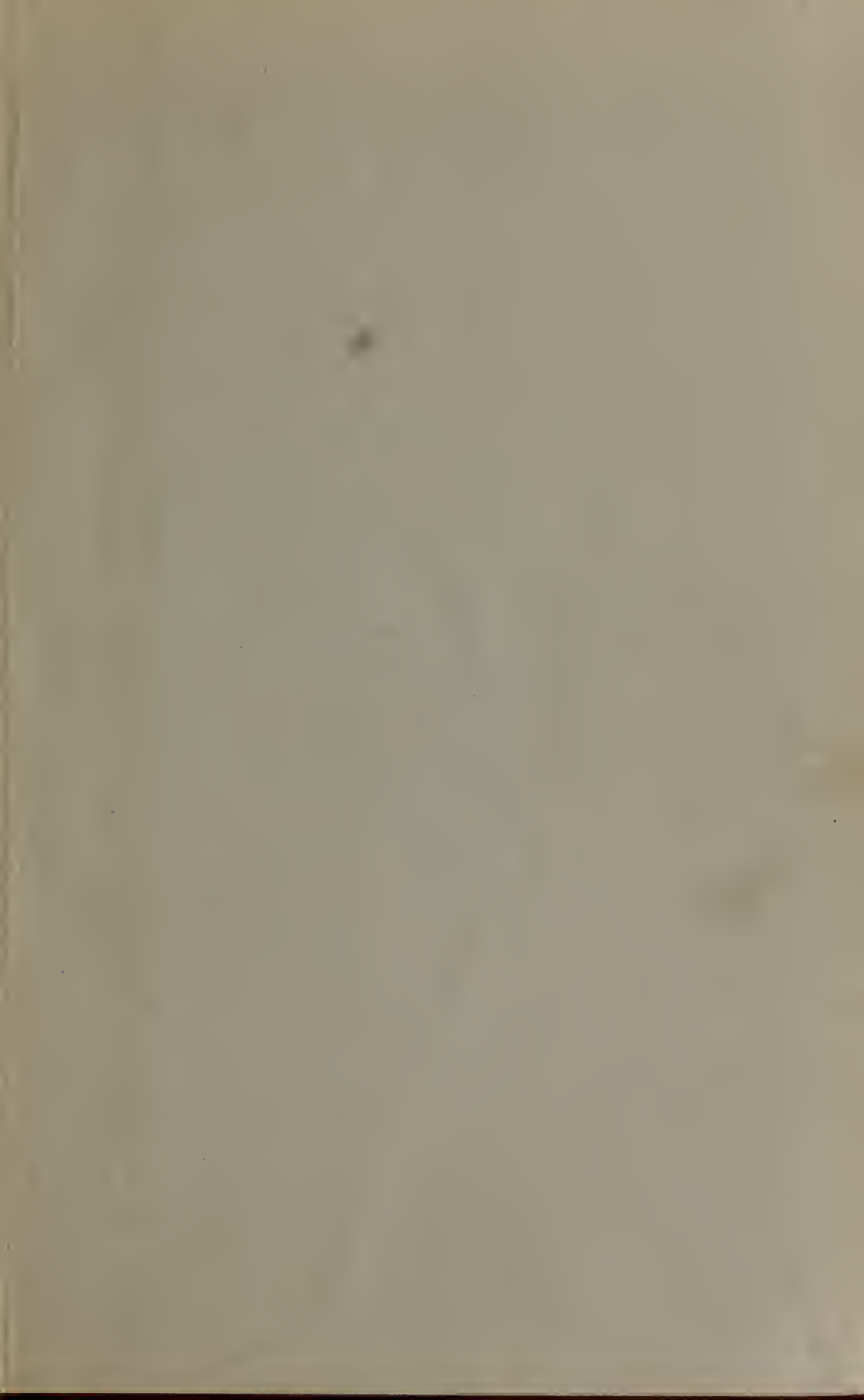


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HEINEMANN ✎ LONDON 1906

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ALPHABET

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TO
MY FATHER'S MEMORY

*To those whose hearts upon some coffin lie
To knock for entrance—whose best visions took
Fire from a grave—I dedicate the cry
And all the tidal sameness of this book.*

*They will not blame me if my poet repeat
A thousand times his phrases like a child:
For like a child, to all that he can meet,
He talks of love that's vigilant and wild.*

*To Petrarch, life was but a mirror fair
Wherein his lady's beauties tranced lay:
Her eyes, her lips, her voice, her smile, her hair
Made the strange spectrum of his lonely day.*

*For me, I con these bright monotonous things
That, when my angel meets me on the strand
And stuns me in the rushing of his wings,
I may say something he can understand.*

40. 11/11/11
AMERICAN

ON THE DEATH OF
MADONNA LAURA.



Sonnet I.

AN me, that face, the dreamy look, the way
She had of carrying her little head!
And oh, her voice, the mortal things it said
That hound me now and have me for their prey!
And oh, her laughter, like a shower in May,
Let me not think on that: would that the bed
Where it is quenched held me—would I were dead!
The world grows dark, my dull feet go astray.
O you, the half of every breath I draw,
For I was yours—you hear that phrase? The words,
Like a great wheel, turn on my breast and grind:
And that last time (O God, the wound is raw!)
Her words went: "Love, Love, Pleasure," like Spring
birds—
Words that shriek by me now in Death's great wind.

267.

Canzone I.

265

WHAT shall I do? Some counsel, Love, impart.
Sure it is time to die,
And I have lingered longer than I should :
My Lady's dead, and she has ta'en my heart,
And, to rejoin them, I
Must slay myself. Is it not understood
That nevermore the food
And wine of her dear presence come to me?
Do you not therefore see
I cannot bide, thus maimèd and alone,
When all the reason for my life is gone?

Love, you felt deep and measured well the blow,
Therefore I talk to you.
With furlèd wings and flickering torch you stand,
And look upon me with sad eyes that know.
Our tent-pole's snap't in two ;
The sun is darkened over all our land ;
And futile ropes of sand
I make, my verses, powerless to bind
The things that tear me. Are you deaf and blind,
O senseless Earth, to turn and spin through space,
When she is gone for whom you ran the race?

Fallen is your glory, and you know it not.
How bitter 'tis to think
You have been sheltered in her consciousness,
Her little feet have touched you, now forgot ;
High Heaven itself did sink—

On you, unworthy, left its bright impress.
But I, alas! who less
Than nothing care for aught that is not she,
Must tell all men that be
What Death has done—though weeping sore, I must :
All that I live for is that sacred trust.

Ah me, to clay is turned the lovely face
That let me see and feel
What Heaven was, as through no darkened glass.
Her being intangible now stars that place ;
For it did flit and steal
Forth from its girlish veil and gown, alas !
Yet shall it come to pass
That she will put them on for evermore,
Lovelier than when she wore
Their beauty on the daisied earth of Spring :
April in Heaven is another thing !

The lovely lady comes more lovely back,
And shows me in my sleep
A Spring in Heaven ; and I forget straightway,
Hearing my heart she holds, all that I lack
(The spell goes very deep).
She holds it out—it calls her name, “ Ah stay ! ”
But sudden all the day
Of sad reality sweeps round my head,
I know my love is dead.
What then I feel Love knows, and I hope she
Who sees God's eyes, where all things mirrored be.

O ladies fair, who saw her beauty's flower
And her angelic life,
How like a thing divine she walked the world,
Grieve deep for me, who know her in Death's power,
But not for her—who strife
And tears has changed for peace, while I am hurled
From depth to depth, and whirled
Through endless nights and days of endless pain.
I know, time and again,
But that Love whispers something in my ear,
I'd kill myself without a doubt or fear.

Nay now, my soul, retract what you have said
Lest, through these rebel cries,
You lose that garden where your lady is
And lives and laughs, whom every one thinks dead—
Looks in some stream and sighs
To see how fair she is: "And I am his.
High on his verses 'tis
My name goes ringing over all the world—
His rhymes that are impearled
And perfumed. If he really loves my eyes
He will stay on to make their incense rise."

Fly from blue skies and flowers,
Mistake not mirth and music for your peers,
My Song, but only tears.
You would be lost where happy things avail,
My poor Canzone, in your mourning veil!

Sonnet II.

269

Down the white Column and the Laurel fall

That were a shade for my perplexèd heart :

I may not find them now in any part

Of this great world. O East and West Winds, call

My double treasure! Underneath a pall

It lies:—no answer. No, you need not start.

No bribes avail, no stuff from any mart :

I shall not see them any more at all.

Stoop low, my once proud head ; more than the sands

In number be the scalding tears that well

In eyes that laughed. Ah me, how long one stands

Hoarding one's heart's best treasures—till, pell-mell,

Sudden they flash between the helpless hands,

As from Danaïd sieve the water fell.

Cardinal
Colonna
and Laura.

Canzone II.

O LOVE! If thou wouldst win back my true vow,
As well it seems thou wouldst, another test,
Most marvellous confest,
Thou must submit to ere I bow the knee :
In the cold grave the treasure I love best
Lies and is hid from me ; go find it now.
Alack ! go touch it thou :
For me, poor almsman, set the great heart free
That was both inn and temple unto me.
And if thy power hath sway, O mighty Lord,
From asphodel garden even unto the pit
(As well believe of it
All gentle souls whom thou dost fend and guard),
Snatch back my stolen Sweet from Death's dark place,
And hang thy rosy banners in her face.

Set in her lovely face the living light
That was my beacon, and the heavenly flame
That wasted me ; the same
That wastes me still, and sears, though it is out :
And never eager hart athirsting came
With so much longing to a well-spring bright
As I will come at sight
Of all sweet bitter things that hedge about
My Lady in the silence of her doubt.
As it has ever been (ah, woe is me !),
The very thought of her doth make me blind
With tears ; and my tired mind
Doth prick to follow where no hope can be.

But where she is not, thou, a discrowned king,
Shalt not dictate to me in anything.

Let me but hear once more that breath of day
Sound in my ears, as in my soul it sounds ;
Singing, it surely wounds
And slays wrath and disdain ; its brooding note
Quells all things vile and dark ; like frightened hounds,
Before that liquid gold they fly away.
Take what you will as pay
If you will lift me, Love, and let me float
Where hope may read what endless longing wrote.
My spirit drank renouncement even as wine,
But my weak senses, eyes and ears, they crave
For ever, of the grave,
The body and the voice for which they pine.
What's in the world that can my longing move
While the black earth lies over my first love !

Show me again the splendour of the glance
That was the sun of all my ice-bound way.
Meet me again to-day
In the bright archways where my soul ran in
Laughing. Take viol or psaltery and play
As when the Thrones and Seraphim would dance :
By some immortal chance,
Thou mayst convince me, when thy chords begin,
What the love was that dared do all but sin.
Then loose the words that like tall warriors were
When they o'ermastered me (O mouth, the spring
I am thirsting for !), and fling
Thy snare into the ripple of her hair ;

With thy deft hands those curling locks unwind ;
Hide me within them—hide me, Love—and bind !

From that gold maze might nothing conjure me,
Once thou hadst prisoned me, not even death :
Hidden near her soft breath
That like a busy spirit comes and goes.
“ O face that day and night,” my sonnet saith,
“ Fostered my longing, kept it green to see
As myrtle and laurel be
In June, and when the woodland feels the snows !”
But since Death took you in his hand, my rose,
The golden knots being loosened, lo ! I droop,
Because I know that, while the earth goes round,
The hand will not be found
That tied the twinèd sweetness of their loop.
O Love, I take thy serpent up to warm :
There’s nothing in the world can do me harm.

Then wert thou awful when thy weapons were
Pure fires unseen from limpid eyes. Great pain
I felt, and fought in vain ;
In sooth, against high Heaven no arms prevail.
The dream, the laughter, and the dream again ;
The gentle bearing, courteous mind astir
With words which, all aver,
To make knights out of villains would avail ;
The angelic presence, flower-like, meek and frail,
Which this way swayed and that in winds of prayer ;
The going and the staying, which amazed
Those who beheld and praised,
And paused to wonder which were lovelier—

These weapons sharp thy triumph did ensure :
Now thou art stript of them, and I secure.

The souls which the three Fates make serfs to thee
Thou bindst at divers times in divers ways.

Gone are the only days,

Cut is the one bond thou couldst hold me in ;

Cut is the bond, and freedom weighs and preys

Upon me till I cry : " Oh, wait for me,

My starry pilgrim ! See—

God bound us fast : oh, leave me not to Sin !

Despair and Doubt to suck my breath begin."

God gave brief touch and sight of her, then higher

He rapt her than where seraphs' songs are heard

That, a dawn-drunken bird,

I might mount heavenward through my great desire.

✓ But, Love, how clearly rang thy passing bell !

How shrank thy kingdom when those white lids fell !

Death hath delivered me from bonds, O Love ;

For my dear Lady went to Heaven (ah me !)

And left me free, O Love !—how sad and free !

Sonnet III.

271

THAT golden leash, whose ravelled ends do strain
Full one and twenty golden threads agleam
About my heart, is broken. Living stream,
Life ebbing out, men do not die of pain :
For while I lay in the ebb, nor could sustain
Even the thought of Life, Love, cruel, did seem
To come like a lithe tiger in my dream,
Breaking his prey again and yet again ;
On every side but one he lit great fires
With his wild torch, and on that side he laid
A subtle-meshèd web from end to end :
But then came Death, in sound of many lyres,
Stamped out the flames, rended the net, and stayed
To sooth my tortured senses like a friend.

Having lost La
after twenty-one
years of longing
in the frenzy of
his grief, the Po
begins to turn to
An Unknown
Lady—but sud-
denly Death
takes her.

Sonnet IV.

212

Now she is dead, I stand so calmly by
At the storm's heart and watch the whirl of things :
I watch the hours fly fast in endless rings,
And Death close on them with his buzzard cry.
I stand so still, you do not know that I
Have a deep knife-wound in my breast. Time sings
About my head with mighty rhythmic wings ;
Death with his carrion breath calls : " Die, die, die !"
O heart, I am away ; I hear you, pent,
And clamorous for the end, bring to my mind
The godlike voyage that you godlike went
(My derelict, your silken sails are rent),
Spreading silk sails in a great magic wind
(And your bright beacon fires are out, are spent).

Sonnet V.

273

WHY do you stumble, ever looking round
Over your shoulder at the summer ways
We may not go again? The sheep but graze :
You tremble at the sound, and every sound
In the autumn fields. I tell you that the wound
Must close : when I speak, who is wise obeys.
Drop her soft hand ; forget that arm that sways,
Impalpable yet warm, beside you. You are bound.
Either you kill these things or they kill you.
See how the earth is fair : have you no will
To go the open road with me, your true
And loyal friend, on towards the heavenly hill ?
Dark was the day when first she met our view
If, dead and living, she can but maim you still.

Reason and
with the P

Sonnet VI.

274

O CRUEL thoughts, will you not give me peace?

When Love and Fate and Death are at my gates,

And pity never their stern zeal abates,

Do foes spring up within lest they should cease?

And you, my heart, who did the bolts release,

Betrayed for one of these your murderous mates

I know what hand is on the lock that grates:

Your treasons ever are of the same piece.

Pour out no more wine for Love's flag-bearer ;

Nor let the world's spies warm them at your fire

The while you drag and wheel out secretly,

Knowing my death-blow is the certain hire,

The catapult for Death the Wayfarer.

Nay, open war, my heart—no strategy.

Sonnet VII.

(218)

Poor eyes! they put a shade upon our Sun,
And stole away with it to Heaven's walls;
Its brightness now on what strange feasting falls!
It must be lonely there . . . Poor ears! they won
Away our exquisite words—we are undone:
Forsooth they're "understood in Heaven's halls"!
Poor feet! you "are all ready when she calls"?
Nay, on a sea of glass you could not run.
I know you "always followed her on earth,"
But I have told you it is different now.
Do not all torture me. You know that dearth
Of her you never knew through me: but vow
Vengeance on Death; but tell him, "What mild mirth
When we reach God's green garden—you know how!"

Sonnet VIII. 226

SINCE that serene, angelic, lofty thing
Fled suddenly dim terror is my lot,
And awful silence. I who plan and plot,
Day in day out, in subtle ways to sing
And tell my pain and so some ending bring,
Feel like a dreaming child who tries, with hot
And stricken throat, to call for help, and not
A sound will come. O Death, thou scornful king,
To snatch those clinging hands! O happy mould,
You that now press that lovely girlish face,
Why do you cover her and leave me cold?
No other house had I, no other place
To hide me from life's terrors manifold,
And sit and drink the cordial of God's grace.

Sonnet IX. 227

OH, Love must bring me some new counsel soon ;
He has raised up things I may not control.
Such fear and agony hang on my soul
That, though desire still lives, poor hope doth swoon.
Bewildered and most desolate, no boon
I get from day or night save tears that roll
From tired eyes. I trip in every hole :
The soft hand guides no more this many a moon.
I dream her hand in mine ; but oh, she lies
Deep in the earth, or through a heaven glows
Clearer than crystal to my heart, not eyes :
Ever for them a ghostly veil, that throws
A gathering whiteness on my hair, denies
The deep-desired light their yearning knows.

Sonnet X.

(778)

✓ WHEN all her golden beauty did uncloset
In Love's great noon and glory of desire,
Slipping her sheath, and yearning higher, higher,
Laura, my life, did leave me to my foes,
And living, lovely, disembodied, rose
To the white wicket and the shimmering choir.
Ah, why does not that "last day" come and tire
My soul for Heaven?—that last day one knows
But as the first in Heaven. The same way
That all my thoughts go, and as feather light,
My soul would rise, a pilgrim keen and gay.
Why must I wait, dear Christ? Why must I stay?)
Bitter and ever bitterer grows the fight.
Had I but died three years ago to-day!

Sonnet XI. (227)

LET be, O calling bird and rippling lake ;
And, crystal cymbals of the running streams,
Cease your intolerable clash that seems
Her cries and laughter : for my soul's awake,
And all my helpless verse into the heart-break
Of song springs up. Nay, what is that ? There gleams
A Silken Something where the wild rose teems ?
I thought her in the clay, by some mistake,
Not understanding heaven ; but rosy, tanned,
She's there—that movement—all the red and white :
“No tears ! No tears ! You do not understand
That, when I seemed to have closed my eyes that night,
I merely opened them upon a land
Like one great flower—Infinity—the Light.”

Sonnet XII.

250

I DO not think that I have ever seen
So many times in one short afternoon
The Lady they call dead : I did nigh swoon
When she came running towards me through the green,
Laughing and calling out, "Where have you been?
Did you not know it was the first of June?"
She faded on the sunny air too soon :
A long hour later and I saw her lean
Against a flowering hedge full drowsily.
And though this land is balmier than the nest
That Cypris made for Eros, and there be
Maids here most fair, how strange it seems to me
Here, here, where late the heart stirred in her breast,
That men should think of aught that is not she.

Sonnet XIII. 281

How often, flying to a dim wooded place
From others, and, if may be, my own soul,
I have felt the slow tears burn my heart and face,
And heard them strike the grass! I have wasted whole
Ecstatic summer days by the wild race
Of the dark Sorga, seeing it turn and roll
There where it rises up, at the rock's base;
I shrinking from the sunshine like a mole.
How often, when I have sought my High Delight,
Has she come out of Sorga's deepest deep
To gather rushes, while with hungry eyes
I have watched her tread the field flowers where they
creep,
Which, as from mortal lady's foot, would rise :
Then have I seen her crimson up, and weep.

Sonnet XIV.

(252)

TRANSFIGURED Soul, so often you return
To break my endless night of pain and doubt
With those clear eyes, that Death has not put out
But lit with fire immortal! Ah, I yearn
For words to tell how bright the raptures burn
When I begin to see you round about
Old haunts, rouged and bejewelled as at a rout,
Or standing knee-deep in the feathered fern.
✓ Years I went singing of you up and down,
Now I go mourning for you through the land
In heavy loneliness. My Day, my Crown,
One splendid joy great sorrow cannot drown:
That when you come I know and understand
Your walk, your voice, your face, your hair, your gown.

Sonnet XV.



You have discoloured, Death, the loveliest face
That ever was, and quenched the loveliest eyes;
Forcing the locks and breaking all the ties
Of a keen soul in a most lovely case.
An instant all my good doth blast: O base!
On those soft lips your heavy finger lies,
That spoke so sweet, and you endure my cries.
I wander blind with tears from place to place.
'Tis true my lady comes to help me then
When Love and Pity lead her by the hand:
No other succour holdeth life for me.
And if her speech, and if her gesture grand
I could impart, I would transform, not men,
But tigers, bears, and monsters of the sea.

Sonnet XVI. 284

SHORT is the light, and quick upon its ways,
Which gives me back my Lady who is dead.
O sweet brief comfort, quickly come and fled !
No harm can touch me while the vision stays.
Love, who has bound me to the cross, delays
And trembles when he hears her footsteps led
To my soul's threshold : " Ah, the wounds that bled
So deep will bleed again," he softly says.
A lady to her home she proudly comes,
Startling the black-winged thoughts that brood and
weigh ;
Her dreaming eyes put all dark things to rout.
The soul, which so much brightness overcomes,
Gives a faint, yearning sigh : " O blessèd day,
When you looked round and found a pathway out ! "

Sonnet XVII. 286

WHEELING and pausing comes my Lady down
At a great angle, floating dreamily ;
Now I can count her rings—and, O heart, see !—
The summer day at Avignon—*that* gown.
Now she will hurry with me through the town
And go into my lonely room with me,
And stay a long time : and I first will be
Her child, and she will lend me her bright crown
To hold, and sing strange cradle songs and lull
The lonely pain. Then will she be my bride ;
And my poor little room, so bare and dull,
Will be a presence-chamber fair and wide :
She will come whitely, like a homing gull,
And lie and laugh and whisper at my side.

Sonnet XVIII.

If I could tell how tender are the sighs
Of that most lovely lady who was mine,
And now is set in Heaven for a sign,
And yet seems here ; lives, feels, walks, loves, and cries ;
A giant in your breast desire would rise.
She seems by some swift instinct to divine
Whenever on my lonely road I pine,
Faint or turn back, pause where the wrong road lies :
"Straight up, towards Heaven, is the way to go !"
Her soft phrase, low and wistful, ends in prayer,
In thoughts celestial that are all her own :
And then I vow the mighty things I dare,
Strong in her sweetness which doth pierce me so,
Yea, would have power to draw tears from a stone.

Sonnet XIX. 282

SENNUCCIO, though grief-stricken and alone
You left me, yet I have a guiding light
In that hard day when straight and happy flight
You took, and at the last smiled on my moan.
Now do you see Earth's breast how it is sewn
With gold and ebony of day and night,
The formal garden of the stars so bright ;
And our short-sightedness to you is known.
So with your joy I temper my great pain.
Friend, when you come to holy Venus' star,
Guittone, Cino, and Lord Dante deign
To greet, and our Francesco, where they are ;
✓ But, meeting Laura in the lilied lane,
Kiss only the gemmed wheel-rim of her car.

On the death
of his friend
Sennuccio.

Sonnet XX.

IN these wild hills I baffle all pursuit,
And see far off the plain and promised land
Where she was born who, in her little hand,
Fostered my heart in its flower time and fruit ;
And where, that awful day, she left us mute
After the shock we could not understand,
Mute and heart-broken at the swift command,
The swift surrender. Not a savage brute
But feels I am cut off from human things,
But vaguely knows my agony ; and when
The madness takes me, and my tired eyes
Strain hot to see her, the rough coats, the wings
Gather about me, subtler far than men,
And comfort me till I forget the skies.

Sonnet XXI.

289

MY Soul ! My Flame ! Made glorious with the fear
Of the veiled bride at nightfall were her eyes
When, all too early, she did softly rise
To her own land and to that star, her peer.
She lived on such good terms with Heaven here !
Now I begin to wake and realise
How on my deep desire, that never dies,
She laid the opiate of a touch too dear.
She gave the freedom of her heavenly town
Even while living, showed me all its ways ;
And that omnipotent and harp-like voice
I followed, spell-bound, all the innocent days :
But now ambiguous longings weigh me down ;
When she was here—ah ! then there was no choice.

Sonnet XXII.

THUS runs the world ! Now do I dream and dote
On what was once sharp agony to me,
My Lady's luminous austerity
And high disdain ; now do I say by rote
Her sweet relentless things ; and what she wrote
On her great missal's marge of ecstasy,
Self-abnegation, ardours heavenly,
Calls to me gaily like a throstle's note.
O Lady, lapped in earth and crowned on high,
Who saved my soul alive out of the seas
As by main force, and warmed it in your breast,
Lo, all the hours I here upon my knees
Think on these things ! And, lo, my longings cry,
Cry out aloud, from this poor mound, your nest !

The Poet writes
from his Lady's
grave.

Sonnet XXIII. 291

WHEN I have seen the Dawn with rosy hands
Press backward all that shimmering of gold
That is her hair, then I grow weak and cold,
Stagger and cry: "Look, where my Lady stands!"
Happy Tithonus, your heart understands
And marks the absent hours all said and told
With steadfast patience: knowing that you will hold
Those longed-for steeds when the hour has run its sands,
And touch her close again, a changeless light;
So, young or old, you throw a gibe at Death,
And make his cloudy pageants thin and vain:
But all my life is but a hollow night;
I lie alone, and fear to draw my breath,
Because of what can never come again.

Sonnet XXIV.

THE eyes of which those singing words I said,
The hands I touched, the feet whose going was
Ever upon my heart, and which, alas!
Have made me different from others; head
In pure and lucent gold apparellèd;
The angelic laugh (that alabaster vase
That broke to let Heaven out), to go, to pass,
And be a little dust, insentient—"dead"!
And I still live, and faint beneath the stroke
Of my own scorn: what, I, without her, here?
Mad Memory doth stab me in the breast . . .
Make room for me too in that grave—near, near!
The veins are dry and, oh, the heart is broke!
The lyre-string loose with tears: silence is best.

Sonnet XXV. 243

If I had only known that you would like
 To hear my dreams and sorrows speak in rime,
 I would have worked more subtly all the time
And found a better instrument to strike.
And then she died ; and, as a broken dyke,
 My will was powerless ; and all the chime
 And rhythm of verse repelled me like a crime,
A blasphemy of her and Love alike.
She that did make me speak was dead ; and sure
 I only spoke to ease my yearning heart
 Where, oh, so many wounds and fevers were !
 It was a cry, a call, and not an art :
Now, when I could make poems that would endure,
 She calls me, tired and silent, after her.

Sonnet XXVI. 294

SHE who was wont, sheer light, vitality,
To stay in my poor heart, as, let us say,
A lovely princess, who has lost her way,
Stays in a rustic's house full courteously,
Is rapt from where things warm and human be.
I, barred from Heaven, I cannot even pray,
Love and my soul moan so the livelong day—
No one will ever know how piteously.
They sob within where no one hears; the knife
Turns in the wound; I hear my soul and Love,
But can help no whit: I am done, am spent,
“I cry like a young swallow, moan like a dove;
Ashes to ashes—dust to dust: my life
Is rolled away from me as a shepherd's tent.”

Sonnet XXVII. 295

OH, how my sweet-voiced thoughts in a bright choir
Together reasoned about her of old :
“ Perhaps even now doth Pity drug her—Cold !
Perhaps she thinks of us . . . whether we tire.”
But since she has gone to slake Divine Desire
And reft the poor world of her body's gold,
Perhaps she whispers, though so crowned and stoled :
“ I see and hear your longing like a fire.”
Both phrases exquisite ; but, oh, they ring
Such different changes ! And my soul is faint
With just their difference. O Far and Calm,
At home again—at home—you soft strange thing !
Have you forgot mortality, my Saint,
Which knows by heart my passion and your palm ?

Sonnet XXVIII. 296

I USED to be so sorry for my sin,
But, oh, I did not know how it would feel
To hear her grave-stone ring from some one's heel,
And know I could not want her now—nor win ;
The rapture of the hidden wound wherein
Gleamed the god's arrow. O dear steel, dear steel,
Did I not bear you bravely? Now I kneel
To the three Parcae at their whispering din
Of shears and spindle: "Give back the old pain !
You know I only lived because the wound
Was open and the shaft was firm in it.
Oh, pity ! Give the arrow back again :
Then you may take all else the sun goes round,
And quench the mighty stars where they are lit."

Sonnet XXIX. (297)

Two mighty enemies did sit and feast,
Beauty and Chastity, thronèd in such joy
That never subtle sin could him annoy
Who served them, though he were the last and least.
But Death came out of the ill-omened East
And severed them : one, Heaven without alloy
Carries in triumph ; the other, sods destroy,
Shutting those lovely eyes (Earth senseless beast !).
Her godlike phrases, her high humble way
Of one used to throne service, and her smile,
Her look—ah, burning wound that throbs again !—
Are gone : and if I linger on awhile,
Perhaps it is that I would rather stay
To draw these records from my tired brain.

The Plague
comes out of
the East to
Laura.

Sonnet XXX.

298

WHEN I am looking on the swift-foot years
That scatter, as they run, my perfumed dreams,
And trample on the torchlight where it streams
From passionate moments that affright my fears;
And when I see them, through my rushing tears,
Divide my treasure roughly, as it seems,
And take one half to Heaven's door that gleams
With welcoming heads, the other where Death peers:
I try to rouse myself, look at my hands
To see if they are real, and sadly see
That I am stripped and stricken and alone.
Then do I suffer the worst pains that be:
Fear of myself, and tightening of the bands
Of my imagination gagged and thrown.

Sonnet XXXI.

(297)

WHERE is the forehead, and the jewelled snood
Which hid my eyes for ever from sordid things,
And the curved eyebrows like two slender wings,
And those great stars that led me in the wood,
And that white face where every thought and mood
Translucent passed, unveiled ; oh, where now rings
The silver sequence of her words that wrings
The heart with ecstasy ? Misunderstood,
Perhaps, by angels ! Learning, valour, all
Are vanished. And, alas ! my heart of lead
Must be so heavy in her hand, its nest.
Oh, in some street to feel her shadow fall
Just once—the shadow of her little head—
Across the anguish of this empty breast !

Sonnet XXXII.

(300)

Oh, how I envy the poor famished earth
That clasps her close whom I may never see,
And keeps away the air from her and me ;
And the celestial city of her birth,
Which sets a double guard upon its girth
Of flaming walls, since that within them be
That soul and those immortal senses—She ;
And those her luminous comrades who, in mirth
And floating dances, bring her lightly home !
I know that envy is a fiend astir ;
But near the mirage wells I thirst and rave
In a vast desert, I who saw Death come,
Deliberately quench my life in her,
And, throned in her deep eyes, refuse my grave.

Sonnet XXXIII. (361)

CONIES and squirrels and all woodland things,
And scurrying brushwood things that flash and rise
With sudden movements, and you gauzy flies
And tawny birds that come on questing wings,
You comfort me ; and yet this moment stings :
For well I read the question in your eyes,
As you come closer, as the evening dies,
And wonder at me in great timid rings.
Did not another Francis teach you all
Most mighty mysteries? Well, I will try—
Explain why I am different : you see,
Great Grief has taken my body for his hall,
Since far beyond these oaks, with a faint sigh,
My Lady's soul left earth and life and me.

Sonnet XXXIV. (302)

RAISING myself to realms whose splendours cloud
Her whom I seek and find not on this earth,
There, among those of the Third Circle's girth,
Marvelling I met her, lovelier and less proud.
She took my hand and said : " Desire speaks loud
And true : thou wilt be with me here in mirth
Of endless music, me, thy foe, whose birth
And dawn of youth found long ere night a shroud.
My bliss no mortal brain can understand ;
For thee alone, and what thou lov'st so much,
I wait, my wondrous veil which lies down there."
Why did she fade away and drop my hand ?
The poignant sweetness of her heavenly touch
Had almost loosed my soul on that soft air.

Sonnet XXXV. 283

Love, who fared with me on that summer day
Along this bank and heard the river sing
And grieve with us like to a living thing,
Because I set you in my Lady's way—
I who alone could do it—Love, you pray
My company; and in remembering
And wondering, we try to dull the sting
Of the barbed sweetness of the new-cut hay.
O dark-eyed fauns that haunt this leafy place,
O wood nymphs, and O water nymphs that rise
With gem-like fishes clasped to your chill breasts,
Yes, yes! It is I! It is I! But in my face—
A baffling thing to your bright questioning eyes—
Sits Death, and mocks me with his brutal jests.

Sonnet XXXVI. 304

WHEN first I felt that singing flame awake,
Which Love in the white hollow of his palm
Had kindled (where alone there is a calm
Not all the winds of Time and the world can shake),
I wandered often by this lonely lake;
The flame gnawed at my heart; and for a balm,
I made recurrent rimes that might becalm
The trouble of my heart, that strove to break.
Some one has nailed a little marble slab
Over her face and wrapped her in a shroud:
And now I know, O Love, come back to me!
And not archaic rimes, but words that stab—
A beauty that is mortal, lonely and proud—
Shall run in marvellous rhythm all for thee.

Sonnet XXXVII. ³⁰⁵

Oh, turn again in the long asphodel way
 You dove-like creature! Soul that slipped a sheath
 Fairer than columbines in Venus' wreath,
Pity my broken heart that once was gay :
Now no misunderstanding can betray
 Your sentinel conscience ; you now look beneath
 The veil of life ; and in the hard world's teeth
I cry : " She need not care now what you say ! "
Look near the great rock where the Sorga flows—
 Do you not see me lying in the grass
 And crying for all the years that you are gone ?
No, no ! Not where the garden was, alas !
Nor near your house, where a strange footstep goes :
 There are things there you must not look upon.

Sonnet XXXVIII. 306

THAT sun which ran before me all the way,
And showed me all the short cuts and the turns,
Was drawn into the Sun of Suns, and burns
Whiter in that white glory day by day.
I feel along the hedges now and stray,
Oftentimes faint and fall : you see one learns
The ways of darkness slowly. Love returns
Sometimes, and leads me near the flowering may—
Carries my heavy heart that stifles me,
And says : “ Now I will take you everywhere
That you have been with her. Nay, haply she
Is running down some heavenly thoroughfare,
And if we listen, we shall hear, maybe,
Her silver sandals ring on the soft air.”

Sonnet XXXIX. 307-

It seemed to me my wings were very strong :
Down the long centuries I thought my flight
Would be as swift as Time, as sure as light ;
And as my flight was, so should be my song.
But lo, how soon I fell among the throng
Of nestlings fallen from the nest at night :
The trailing wing, the eye half glazed half bright !
And now I see the weakness and the wrong.
But surely Love is a most mighty king ;
And Love first wounded me ; and when my brain
Was fire (ah, long ago !) he cried : “ Sing ! Sing ! ”
And then came Death, that Lord of High Disdain,
And dropped a poison in my wound, a sting,
That made me half delirious with pain.

Sonnet XL. 308

FOR her who mastered me, and left no choice
But I must never see the Arno run
Beneath the towers of Florence in the sun,
Because the magnet of her poignant voice
Is crying from the Sorgia, I rejoice
To serve in poverty : home have I none ;
Far from the court and luxury, like one
Born to the plough, I live, and ever noise
My dreamy passion—try to paint with words
The veiled roses and the white in white
Of her dear spirit-flesh : but these wild herds
Know how I fail and weep when on my sight
Crowd the strange glories of her soul ; like birds
They come, they rush like stars upon the night.

Sonnet XLI. 309

THAT singular, miraculous, bright thing—
That was so much at home yet so remote,
And wore mortality like a gemmed coat,
Regally, lightly—did the seasons bring
Just for a time among us. Marvelling
I looked upon her, and her beauty smote
Straight on my heart; and then I sat and wrote,
As clearly as I could for Love's sharp sting.
But when I looked again, she was not there:
I who had only just begun to tell
What she was like for those who could not see!
And Heaven's starry cloisters were made ware
Of her soft movements. Wellaway! Ah well!
Silence flow round her like a cradling sea.

Sonnet XLII.

310

Zefiro
THE South Winds come and all their family bring,
The grasses and, among the grass, the flowers
In the wood bowers; and there, among the bowers,
The redness and the whiteness of the Spring.
I hear the chattering swallow on the wing,
But Philomela sobs: before her lowers
The awful voyage to the awful towers;
She sobs to hear her sister Procne sing.
A solemn rapture takes me, as I go,
To think how the sun rose in Avignon
One morning of a Spring of long ago;
And birds, and flowering fields, soft eyes that run
Upon a missal, dreams that are like snow,
Become blank hostile mysteries thereupon.

Sonnet XLIII. (311)

THAT nightingale's entreating voice—ah me !
Perhaps her sons are pouring out their best,
Flooding with sweetness heaven marvellously,
The hungry heaven that plunders every nest.
All the long night her notes like heralds be
That noise my very woes : I cannot rest.
O subtle sweet, as moonlight calls the sea,
Again, grief-thrillèd voice, call to my breast !
I thought of all but that : my love-dazed eyes
Love veiled, to make assurance doubly sure.
O double light, that Phœbus' light defies,
You to go out and blot out all our skies !
I know all now, O Fate, and I endure,
And live ; though my great longing never dies.

Sonnet XLIV. (30)

Not Sirius throbbing in a violet sky,
Nor swift white sails upon a violet sea,
Nor armoured knights that pass the greenwood tree,
Nor great-eyed deer that suddenly go by,
Nor news whereon the very dead would cry,
Nor Love going fair in glorious poetry,
Nor, by clear fountains in a grassy lea,
Girls like shrill angels singing as they lie,
Shall ever find the way to my locked heart—
Locked in the dust that was her little hands,
Under the stone which all my light did quench.
O Life, how gladly you and I could part!
My will yearns to her, though it understands
That she did waste its strength, and spoil, and wrench.

Sonnet XLV. 313

THE struggle and suspense have long gone by ;
Death made an end of all uncertain things
(His rolling drums and then his noiseless wings),
And left me only longing and a cry.
She looked at me when it was time to die,
And my wild heart went with her. How it sings
Folded in her white cloak ! All Heaven rings ;
Her laurel wreath stirs slightly ; does she sigh ?
Or is it the great vehemence of that song
That makes the strong leaves quiver ? See them come
From the remotest height of Heaven's hill !
O Winged Ones, do you think I shall wait long ?
Now the bright heads together—and the hum. . . .
I try to say : “ Not mine, O Lord : Thy will ! ”

Sonnet XLVI. 314

NAY, then, my soul, did the faint shadows fare
About you that, upon one golden day,
You came so near her heavenly face and lay
Sucking in golden peace against despair,
While from her movements, from her chain, her hair,
From that pathetic voice, like a brief May,
A message came to us unheeding : "Nay,
I'm your last happy day, for all the care
Of Venus and the bounty of this hour?"
How did I burn, my soul, when my eyes closed
With eyes which I should look upon no more ;
When, thinking them my friends, I thus imposed
My heart's safe-keeping on them : "Fruit and flower
Wither, if you but will, in root and core."

Sonnet XLVII.

YOUTH's irised scarf was falling from my eyes,
I saw not with my senses but my mind ;
I held the threads and watched the ways that
wind,
And looked on all things with a grave surprise.
Is it not piercing sweet for lovers wise
In awful truths to hear the foes behind
The arras, and yet sit full fain and kind
And tender by the glorious fire that dies ?
Love sits with them, and lays his dreamy head
On Chastity's bright breast : a falling star
Is not more dizzy sweet than such an hour.
Death, who is jealous and a god, then said :
"Lo, I spring full-armed to my mailèd car
And, lest he be as God, show forth my power."

The Poet had begun to hope for the time, which was drawing near when he could be near her with impunity ; but Death, being jealous even of so glorious a hope, took her.

Sonnet XLVIII. 3.8

So long I walked with bleeding feet alone
Along the heavy road where she had set
Footprints most cruelly distinct ; and yet
I could press on, because I saw that stone.
“ There,” she had said, “ I’ll sit and hear your moan,
And bind your wounded feet ; and I will get
Some gorgeous autumn flowers, dewy wet,
To crown you ere the swallows be quite flown.”
But, in a moment, all her stainless life
Was of a sudden blown into my eyes
Like snow upon the wind : though it hides the way,
I know that she is gathering in the skies,
With silver basket and a golden knife,
Strange flowers, to crown me on my strangest day.

Sonnet XLIX.

NEVER dry-eyed can I, poor human earth,
Look on these pages that my love-cries fill,
For the far places in my mind and will
That ache with anguish of unpeace and dearth.
Spirit, unvanquishable from thy birth,
Who so much sweetness dost from heaven distil,
Who even on my throbbing rimes canst spill
So much of sweetness that despair's like mirth :
Rime rose in the strange noise of the floodgates
On that strange day when Deep did call to Deep,
And in a whirl of longing that naught sates.
I have become a wild beast, hard to keep,
For thinking on thy lovely face that waits
To greet me, where the unearthly fountains leap.

Sonnet L. 318

WHEN that fair tree I saw, windstruck, lay low
Its scattered leaves upon the homely ground,
And silence fell where had been heavenly sound,
Its mighty roots clear to the sun,—ah, woe,
Had not Love pointed with his hand to show
My heart's old crumbling chamber, that was bound
By strong green ivy, whose live leaves had wound
In leaves that Philomela used to know :
Now that dead laurel, where my wingèd dreams
Could nest, and all my bright-eyed warm desires,
And yet no lightest leaf quiver thereby,
Leaving that friend, doth live in me, meseems.
I kiss the leaves, but they shrill like taut lyres :
“There's one to call now, no one to reply.”

Memory
the para-
site.

Sonnet LI.

FULL dreamily, in a strange dream, I fare
 (Men call it the world), and mark like hunted deer
 The seasons passing; and I sometimes fear,
Being alone, their flying footfall there
Where I have chosen Love's dreadful cross to bear;
 And where, with nerve fallen from the bone, my Dear
 Is shut to in a grave; that you may jeer,
O showman, at your puppets. "Nay, forbear!"
Saith Love. Then I remember she doth wait,
 Immortal the earth-beauty that she wore;
That she runs often to the shining gate;
 And my desire is white heat to the core,
Consuming me and aging me. . . . Oh, sate
 My longing! We need hesitate no more.

Sonnet LII. *320*

Conte Laura

STAINED in the sunset rose, I see the hill
Where, on a day, the glorious light was lit
That made my eager eyes full fain of it;
That air is on my face. Oh, if God will,
Let there be silence now, so that the rill
May sing the very poem as it was writ.
“Alas,” says Evening, mournful, “not a whit!
The tree is down, and dust the pool doth fill.”
O little hollow where she used to float. . . .
The grass is warm where her soft garments lay.
In my canzone long ago I wrote:
“I shall be buried here—just in her way:
So shall I feel her tender feet, and note
‘Here she caresseth me, at last, this day.’”

Written near the house where Laura was born. In a Canzone written before his Lady's death, the Poet had sung the pool where she used to bathe.

Sonnet LIII. 321

Is this the nest in which my Phœnix dressed
Daily in all her gold and rosy things,
Folding my heart in shadow of her wings
To listen to its clamour near her breast?
O root of my dear sickness, let me rest!
O sweet face, whence God's light its glory flings!
O parted mouth, wherefor my darkness rings!
O mouth, O face, Earth knew you for her best;
And therefore Earth is mournful for your sake.
Look upon me you left alone, Unwise!—
And bondsman to the things these walls awake.
Night on the hills where your bright footprint lies,
The hills which you for awful hills forsake,
The hills which knew the daybreak of your eyes!

Laura's
house.

Canzone III. 323

OPENING the casement all alone one day,
I saw things new and magical go by,
Until I tired of thronging marvels bright.
Sudden a woodland doe fled by that way,
Whose starry eyes might cost a god a sigh;
Two fleet relentless hounds, one black, one white,
Pursued her left and right,
So wind-swift that full soon they dragged her down:
Her velvet head was level with the dust,
And bitter Death had thrust
His heavy hand, that shadows all renown,
Before her eyes—he that blights king and clown.

And then, on the high seas, I saw a ship
With silken sails and prow of burnished gold
And ivory sides, all warmed through by a sun
That poured celestial tenderness, to dip
And float upon a sleeping sea, enaureoled,
Her cargo being all Paradise in one:
When sudden there arose
A fetid wind—accursed East, thy breath!—
And drove the boat at once upon a rock
With a heart-breaking shock,
Before I could count one, as the verse saith,
That peerless vessel made its bed with death.

Deep in a little copse there stood in Spring
A laurel tree, and straight from Heaven's grove

It must have been transplanted at its birth,
Where birds and many strange delights did sing ;
And in its shade soft ecstasies did move :
Its beauty cut me off from all the earth,
And its bird mirth,
Until my life was one with it. . . . O rain
Of cruel fire out of a clear sky,
To pass all others by,
And strike my laurel ! Poor world, not again
Shall its green shadow touch you ; pause, then ; wane !

The sound of running water smote my heart—
A murmuring fountain in a dusky wood
That sprang and ran translucent to my feet.
No mortal thing had ever had a part
In that pure source ; nor sheep nor shepherd stood
Where only russet-silver wood nymphs beat
A dancing measure sweet :
When faint with longing I did kneel—ah ! brown
A ghastly little chasm opened wide,
And, at my very side,
Vanished the crystal thing. I sit me down
Grief-shattered, now, with memory for my crown.

A wondrous phoenix, both its filmy wings
Of tender violet and its head of gold,
Seeing in the wild wood radiant and alone,
“ This is some vagrant from immortal things,”
I thought ; but all at once I grew acold. . . .
The laurel and the spring ! I could but moan,
“ Oh, for a heart of stone ! ”
When, seeing the seared leaves blown against its side,

The eloquent parched channel and the rest,
It rent its rainbowed breast
With its own jewelled beak, and proudly died;
While all my being on Love and Pity cried.

And, last of all, through the high flowered grass
I saw a lovely lady dreaming go
(The thought comes like a great wind from the hills);
Tender to all except to Love she was,
And God had wrought her vesture gold and snow;
She looked like snow when cry the first Spring rills,
Her hair like daffodils;
A vapour veiled her holy face. Ah, vain!
A mottled serpent stung her rosy heel:
I saw her pause and reel,
And when I knew she could not rise again
My heart broke. Do, then, all things die but Pain?

Canzone moaning saith:
"These six things made my Master catch his breath,
And sob, and hold out longing hands to Death."

Ballata.

3-4

O LOVE ! When lilies flower,
When Hope is running by, and Joy hand-sows,
Why have they hidden her that healed my woes ?
Hard face of Death ! And, oh, hard heart of Life !
Death plants my field with grief,
And every morning comes to it anew :
Life holds me, though he knows it were relief,
Dying, to be at strife
For one brief moment with the hands that slew.
But she knows all they do :
As on a throne, deep in my heart she glows,
And knows it all—all my hard burden knows.

SILENT I cannot be, and yet I dread
My words, however panoplied and fair,
Unworthy are to dare
The head, gold-haloed, bent from Heaven to hear.
How can a mortal word breathe by that hair,
Unless, O Love, I am prompted, as you said,
Or by that soul one read
Through white humility of flesh so clear?
In that soft prison it had been, my dear,
My hope, my passion, my delight, my Spring,
But a brief April; I was driven along
To where the Heart of Song,
At sunrise in a cloister wandering,
Smote me so that through all the earth I fled
Seeking for flowers worthy of her head.

The prison walls were alabaster, red
The golden roofing, windows a sapphire flame;
And fluttering signals came
Out of the sapphire and made me theirs till death.
Thereafter all Love's warriors of fame
Ran from the gates of ivory, every head
With laurels garlanded
(Even remembering I hold my breath);
They took and bound me. Thereupon one saith:
"Look in the crystal"—and I looked, and lo!
The lonely, lovely Lady deep enthralled,
And round about enwalled
With white transparent things where, to and fro,

He gazes into
the crystal of his
Lady's chastity.

All her least thought was luminously writ.
Nay, I am well-nigh faint to think of it !

Then in a deep courtyard I prisoned lay :
It was embowered all in laurel green,
Screen upon leafy screen,
That like a living thing about me crept :
For when at first I strove to look between,
And ran this way and that to find a way,
A glittering spray
Shook opiate dew upon me, and I wept.
As when some sudden joy hath cried and leapt
Against a sorrow-stricken creature's hand
He, half incredulous, doth stay his moan,
So when I saw, alone,
High on a balcony my Lady stand,
My soul in a vast hunger thither went,
And straightway I forgot imprisonment.

The Laurel M

I was on earth, my heart in Paradise
And rapt away from every other care,
When sudden I was 'ware
That in my marvelling I seemed turned to clay,
As all my life had ebbed ; and that a fair
Mysterious being had striven to entice
My will that turned to ice :
It stood close by me ; eyes as young as day,
Older than all the stars, met my dismay.
" Lay your head here upon my breast," it said ;
" I blew for you this bubble of the earth,
And Agony and Mirth
Lie on my hand as on a marriage bed.

68

He strives wi
Nature (Crea
Energy).

Look, if you will, my eagle, on the sun,
But do not play too far, my little one.

“I blew her bubble too; and when it came
Quivering and swaying from my lips, I thought :
‘Sure I have never wrought
One that was all pure light before, like this.’
Truly it seemed as if, for once, I had caught
All wondrous lovely things that have a name
Alike, yet not the same :
Venus ne’er knelt to Mary Maid ere this,
Ne’er Chastity gave Cupid a long kiss.
The sun had never risen on such a day
As that whereon I blew the irised thing ;
The very air did sing,
The earth was netted in with fragrant may ;
‘Silver but soft,’ I said to Fame, ‘one hears,
Within the song, a sound like falling tears.’

Chastity kisses
Cupid.

“When she came down into that sordid street,
Alien to ways of men and earthly things,
Helpless without her wings,
To mortals and mortality beguiled,
It was a strange, pathetic sight. She clings,
First, to a human breast ; but soon her sweet
Uncertain baby feet
Stammer upon the floor ; and then the child
Creeps on the earth and makes it blossom-wild,
Laughs at the troubled springs until they clear,
And there’s more vivid green among the grass
When she doth cooing pass
On hands and knees ; and winds that hear

Laura learning
to walk.

Her murmuring lips are silent, though as yet
There's but vague speech on lips where milk is wet.

“ When, after quiet growth in a quiet place,
She reached the perfect Springtide of her years,
It seemed that, with glad tears,
The lovely women of the earth had all
Thrown her their crowns. Her eyes were like deep meres
In heavenly highlands ; and her rosy face,
Which radiant locks did case
In living gold, made all the world her thrall.
Your eyes, that looked on her, did dazzled fall ;
The vital warmth that crept to you alone
From the white palace of her soul (and dumb
You grew to feel it come)—
Ah, had Prometheus waited ! Had he known !
And last of all her voice, her very life,
Did not its cadence wound you like a knife ? ”

A second
Prometheus

Here the strange creature turned away its head—
Strange and yet known to me in every pulse ;
Mournful and cryptic grew its glorious eyes :
“ You let the bubbles rise. . . . ”
I clung to it ; but infinite repulse
Met me : “ Why do you let them break ? ” O Song,
I am athirst to die—will it be long ?

Sonnet LIV.

THE lamp that lit Love's house is overturned,
Blanched are the roses in the garden plot,
And his breast-jewel in a ditch, forgot,
Lies buried deep; and Death has well-nigh earned
The victor's crown. Oh, how he must have yearned
To take the things that cannot rust or rot—
Her courage and her glory that die not!
Sated with dust and bones, his longing burned
For all of her that Heaven has—that, clear
As some great sun, shines on the seraphs' wings
And makes the world believe in Heaven's things.
Victor, that home fresh-laurellèd God brings,—
Ah, new-made Angel,—leave the feast to hear
Me, your poor human almsman—O my dear!

Sonnet LV.

.327

O BREATH and perfume, coolness and pure shade
Of my green laurel! O thy hands, thy face,
My Light, my Rest! In what a different place
Thy lonely bed to-night by Death is made.
Now am I blind and tired and sore afraid,
As is the earth when, in that mighty chase,
The moon doth gain upon her brother's pace
Until she blots him from our eyes dismayed.
The lovely Lady slept a little sleep;
Soft angels laughed about her when she woke:
"Unmasked," they said, "at home, we have you fast."
And if my sonnets godlike moan and weep,
It is that the white ultimate word be spoke
And sung of her while time and tide shall last.

Sonnet LVI.

328

It was the last of all my happy days :
They had been few but, as they radiant came,
My heart knew each one by a splendid name.
This was the last ; and in strange, occult ways
My body knew it : as marsh fever sways
The nerves and pulses to its clock-like flame
Even before it strikes, so, with the same
Certain uncertain, sudden slow dismays,
I drifted to my loss. Those lovely eyes,
That see Incarnate Love now and are glad,
Looked into mine and said, unearthly wise :
"From this night on we meet no more here," sad,
Dilating with my pain, "but no one dies !
Nay, take the cross up lightly, as He bade."

Sonnet LVII.

3

O CROSS-ROAD hour ! Uncomprehended day !
And O bright yearning eyes that spoke so well !
What was it that you tried so hard to tell
To me unconscious, going my dreadful way ?
I was too sad, too dull, to see what lay
So plainly on those quivering lids. A bell
Strikes in my brain now every hour, a knell,
“ Not separation, but Death, came your way.”
I thought that parting in that hour and place
Was all Fate had for me, and, wild with grief,
Saw not the awful ultimate decree
Writ in the mortal sweetness of your face.
Death played at hoodman-blind, and with a sheaf
Of his own acrid poppies bandaged me.

Sonnet LVIII.

330

Now I remember how those wistful eyes
Seemed to say : " Drink from us deep, deeper still,
To-day; for never, nevermore you will :
Your foot is ware of this, unwilling, wise."
But there's a moment when one's instinct dies,
It seems, and leaves one helpless : better kill
The man outright than torture him your fill,
Fate, with vague questionings and wrong replies.
Did she not stand quite silent there, and drown
My soul in the long glory of her gaze ?
Saying : " Your magic mirrors must come down ;
They've need of them in Heaven : heap days on days,
They'll wait for your dear image, O my crown,
My double crown—of myrtles and of bays !"

Canzone V.

521
ONCE I was forced to go far, far away
From the bright gushing fountain of my life,
Not following up desire, but my star :
And Love went with me too ; and day by day
He saw me with my rebel heart at strife,
Feeding it hope and memories, which are
The exceeding bitter food of exiles. Far
Have I gone since, and suffered greater wrong
From Fate ; for she has taken hope, my bread,
And only given instead
Memory, whereby no man grows hale and strong :
If I but eat I shall be dead ere long.

For as a courier, whose course is yet
But half run, finds his wallet empty swing
And tries to press on fasting, but in vain ;
So my poor life, which all its strength did get,
And food and drink and every vital thing,
In Laura's eyes, when Death did blight and stain
Their limpid beauty, fell, and not again,
Not through all ages, will it singing run
With heart on fire for a desired goal.
O my bereavèd soul !—
For what are we but ashes scattered on
The waters, or blown up under the moon ?

For life was never anything to me
(Love knows it well—we often speak of it)

Except through her who was my light and his :
Since, feigning death on earth, she rose to see
Her true birthday in Heaven, there is writ
But one phrase on my heart, and it is this :
“Quick—quick—oh, take me where my Lady is !”
And I have every right to plain and moan,
Seeing I might have read, had I looked close,
(Alas, my love, my rose !)
The warning in her troubled eyes (my own !) :
“Die, happy, now ; not later, sad, alone.”

In the eyes wherein my heart was wont to dwell
Before a hateful fate did cast it out,
Envyng its splendid lodging and attire,
Love with his own hand wrote full clear and well,
In pitying letters, what should come about
To end my so long followed sweet desire.
Had I died then, never an autumn fire,
Consuming in the abundance of sweet Earth,
Who laughs at dull destruction, could have been
A paradox as keen,
As beautiful as thou, O Death, or worth
Such noise in Heaven—so much ethereal mirth.

If I had set my scattered thoughts to work,
Instead of letting them, like honey bees,
Quest for the varied sweetness of her face,
I might have read what message there did lurk :
“Your rapture and your ecstasy will cease,
And bitterness and sorrow take their place.”
And thereupon I could the dull disgrace
Of mortal flesh have doffed at her dear feet,

Like a great weariful court robe, and run
To see that all was done
Right in her room in Heaven. Alas, my Sweet !—
She may not know me now when we do meet.

Song, know you one whose love is living peace ?
Say : “ Die, before it cease.”
For death in time is not a grief but rapture,
And blessed are they who its white glory capture.

Double Sestina.

332

ALL my bright youth and all my fortune gay,
Translucent days and quiet-breasted nights,
All my sweet longings, and my lovely verse
That went so flexible and fair in rime,
Are sudden turned to bitterness and moan,
And make me shrink from life and long for death.

For dreadful, cloudy, wild, benumbing Death,
Who is the cause I am no longer gay,
But all alone must fare and make my moan,
Hedged in by cloudy days and dreadful nights,
And sorrows numb that will not wake in rime,
And visions wild that trample all my verse,

Trampled and made to shriek—O lovely verse!—
The things of wrath, and talk of dreadful death.
O Sonnets of the clashing, clinging rime,
That made the gentle-hearted sad and gay,
May ye no more croon love to me at nights?
And may I sing no more, but only moan?

Time was Desire lay hidden in my moan
And set afire my faint and mournful verse;
Her dear delirium mastered all my nights:
But now my cry is bitterer than death,
Despairing of those looks, divine and gay,
Once target for my wan and lowly rime.

Oh, what a target had Love set for my rime
Between her lovely eyes! But moan on moan

Now shakes the fingers that shot brave and gay :
I am blighted, and the blight is in my verse.
Take me, I beg of thee, O pallid Death !
And hang me in thy cloudy days and nights.

Light comes not to my days, Sleep to my nights,
Nor Beauty to the calling of my rime ;
For Beauty heeds not those who live near death.
See how my melody has changed to moan !
Bear witness, Love, in all your reign no verse
Has rung like mine so mournful from so gay.

I have been one with Joy, and strong and gay :
Now I lie close to Sorrow, and these nights
Double my pain, Sestina, and thy verse ;
For my sad heart has doubled my sad rime.
My food was hope that now is grief and moan ;
No shield have I from Death but only death.

Death deals me death ; and the dark hand of Death
Must lead me where stars make the footpaths gay
For her to whom by day I made my moan,
And poured out tears through long impassioned nights,
Then when I wove my golden thoughts in rime
And in Love's fanning wings winnowed my verse.

O my own Tuscan, glow thou in my verse !
Sure I may win my Laura back from Death
If Orpheus, with his Greek that could not rime,
Brought back Eurydice all warm and gay !
But, if this may not be, then days and nights
Vanish, and let Death hush these lips that moan.

How long, O Love, how long thou'st heard that moan,
And suffered the sad sameness of my verse,
And never answered in the dreadful nights!
So now I cling to the cold hands of Death;
For he can lead me to the garden gay,
To her for whom I sing and cry in rime.

If to those heights I may climb up in rime
Where, far above all wrath and woe and moan,
My Lady's beauty makes the heavens gay;
Oh, may she know again for mine the verse
That flowered in her footsteps before Death
Gave her clear days unending—me dark nights!

And you, to whom there come more thrilling nights
Than can be told by love or shut in rime,
Pray that, no longer deaf to me, great Death
Open his doors for ever to my moan:
Sure he must love us—me and my poor verse!
His call chills all men, but to us is gay.

May it be soon! Oh, no more days and nights!
My sorrow-laden verse and pained rime
Entreat your poppies on my mouth, O Death!

Sonnet LIX.

333

Go, my grief-drowsèd sonnet, kneel and knock
On the hard stone that shuts my treasure in
And call her, for your call to Heaven may win,
Where she is really, though that stone doth mock.
Tell her I tire of living, that the shock
Of loss seems heavier now than it has been.
Gathering the boughs she dropped, I do begin
To find her footprints in the Avernian rock.
Murmuring of her incessantly I go
In Vita and *In Morte* to all men :
Tell her that she must come to meet me soon.
Oh, when she calls me, draws me to her so,
Makes me a bright Immortal, Sonnet, then
Shall we not shudder through with joy—and swoon ?

Sonnet LX.

334

If loyal love can merit recompense,
If pity be still powerful near the throne,
Then am I safe ; for clear unto My Own
Shineth, as shines the mighty sun intense,
And to the world, my passion's innocence.
Now doth she look my whole heart through and moan
A little for past doubts, and would atone ;
And her great wings with longing are drawn tense.
And as a dying anchorite doth see
Ursula and her virgins come, impearled,
Eleven thousand like a shower of stars ;
So shall I see my Lady gloriously,
With all the white-stoled lovers of the world,
Leal friends of Christ, come for me to the bars.

Sonnet LXI.

OF all the myriad ladies ever born,
One sent a shaft of mingled love and fear
Straight to my heart : her beauty did appear
Greater than Gabriel's on that Nazareth morn ;
Her crystal mirth, her meekness, made me scorn
All worldly things for ever. I did hear
Two sudden wings unfolded sharp and clear,
For my soul longed to follow her. Ah, mourn
For me ! I could not rise her lark-like way :
And then she went where none might follow her.
Thinking on which, my soul doth grieve and swoon.
Oh, lofty lovely windows, eyes like day,
Where Death, whose wing blights all things with its whirl,
Forced ways into that glorious house, too soon !

Sonnet LXII.

336

SOMETIMES, near the remotest of my dreams,
I come on her whose kingdom is my brain :
She has gone back to that first day again,
That long dead Spring around her breathes and teems :
Bright from its highest height my birth-star gleams,
And all the glories of the heavens rain
Upon her, till I cry out in my pain :
“Your voice ! Your voice !” Oh, passing sweet it seems
To hear her speak ; but sometimes mute as Fate
She stands, until my pulses run and knock,
Until a voice says : “Do your senses fail ?
You know in thirteen hundred and forty-eight,
On April sixth, when Prime was on the clock,
That blessèd spirit doffed its lovely veil.”

Sonnet LXIII.

THIS our fair treasure, lighter than the wind,
Enduring as a shadow doth endure,
Which we call Beauty, never came, be sure
Before this age unveiled to mankind :
All in one body it did throb, unwind
Its glories only there, its mighty lure ;
And I, who saw, was stricken beyond cure.
O lovely ladies of the earth, be kind !
Forgive her herald when he calls : " In her
Alone did Beauty touch its utmost height,
And show the world the meaning of the race."
She hid herself, and passed without a stir ;
And I, who saw her, do not mourn my sight
That blindness threatens : I have seen her face

Sonnet LXIV.

O TIME! O Love! O Life!—you triple mask
Which all men use to hide reality,
Making, forsooth, a clockwork of the sky,
With the great stars to strike and time their task—
My soul is tired, and throws you down to ask
For something real, to slake her thirst thereby :
My soul is tired, and longs with a great cry
To go in close where it may breathe and bask
In utter fusion with the Essential. Cease,
O Lord, through me to revel in the things
Thy hands have made. Urge not the least increase
Of this vicarious bliss on my heart-strings.
Subjective vision has worn me out. Release
Me, Lord : I faint, I fail, and drag my wings.

Sonnet LXV.

THAT which for light and perfume quite outbraved
The perfume-breathing and most luminous East !
That golden bee the sun—all, great and least—
All there, there, in the paragon that saved
The Western beauty, that Laurel Tree that waved,
And shook its head, and danced as at a feast :
Under its boughs my Lord and Lady ceased
Their wistful talk and found the joy they craved.
Then I the nest of all my thoughts most pure
Fixed in my soul's fair tree, and, fire and ice,
I thrilled and flamed with joy, and made my moan :
“ O fragrance of the laurel, long endure ! ”
When God, to make more bright His Paradise,
Took it. Ah me ! it ever was His own.

Sonnet LXVI.

You who are come but just now to the well—
New lamb—are you so timid in that light?
Purer than snow and white as milk is white,
What is it that your eyes say? Who can tell?
Is it not well with you who breathe and dwell
In aloes, myrrh, and cassia? Heavenly plight!
The bed of flowers, the cypress rafters, night
Of stars beyond? . . . What said her eyes that fell?
For you, dear, earth and sea and air do moan,
And my poor heart moans for you night and day:
The great world, like a ring without a stone,
Rolls, marred and useless, down some futile way;
And now—a stranger thing was never known—
Have you grown tired of Heaven, and would you stay?

Sonnet LXVII.

SINCE Heaven opened wide my eyes, I yearn,
From where Love lifts me up on his wide wings,
To mortal things—ah, lovely mortal things,
In one girl's body, where all great stars burn ;
But from her other things, alas ! I turn :
Strange, deep, immortal things, their greatness flings
Me back upon myself, though my thought clings
Where it would understand. I can but learn
Half truths about her ; I have no clear thought—
I have nothing but vague longing : I but throw
And drag a useless net, that brings up naught
Out of the infinite depths the seraphs know ;
There eyes gaze helpless, dazzled, sun-distraught,
And seeing less the more the splendours grow.

Sonnet LXVIII.

O MY Beloved, why so late to-night ?
Is it that you but linger to restring
The carven viol that you mean to bring
To dance to, till my weary heart grows light ?
For lovers see all clear on Heaven's height :
Disdain and anger are a little thing ;
Not as on earth, where pain may true love wring
To know another revels in its plight.
Hang in the air no longer, come to me,
O quiet eyes that look me through and through,
And watch my deep wound throb unceasingly :
Alas ! it will not close as others do ;
Alas ! the thirst is deeper than the sea,
Nothing can quench or satisfy but you.

Sonnet LXIX.

WHAT pitying thing, what angel, was so quick
With my heart's cry through midmost Heaven to wheel?
Already, though I cannot hear, I feel
My Lady's footfall near, and the words stick
That should have welcomed her, and being sick
With longing I can only falter: "Heal,
Touch, take me, save me, teach me, where I kneel,
How I may live, for I have lost the trick."
The lowly beauty of that face, the hand
Outstretched. O God! the little phrase—the one
That only she and I can understand!—
"Dear, your poor cries through all my body run.
It was for you I did it—did withstand. . . ."
The rest are words whose sweetness stops the sun.

Sonnet LXX.

ON food in which my Lord doth so abound,
Mourning and tears, I nourish my tired heart ;
And often I grow faint and often start,
Remembering that this wound is most profound.
She comes, whose like the age has never found ;
Soft splendours from her star-bound tresses dart :
She sits, as though we never more must part,
Gently upon the bed where I am bound ;
Laying the hands which I so much desired
Upon my eyes, and speaking words, a tide
Of sweetness, things no human lips have said.
“ What use,” she says, “ in knowing, if you grow tired ?
Do not cry any more. Have you not cried
Enough for me ? You see I am not dead.”

Sonnet LXXI.

THINKING on her whom Heaven honours to-day,
I see the wistful droop of the blond head,
I see that face, I hear the voice that said
The reticent, angelic things I may
Not keep from breaking my sad heart—and say :
“How is it that I live?” I should be dead
Indeed, but that towards dawn, beside my bed,
Often that sacred beauty greets me—yea,
Takes my poor hands and talks of old-time things,
And doth intently listen to my pain,
To my long agony and all it brings,
Until the arrows of the day, like rain,
Fall through the shadow, and on lingering wings,
Her breast sob-shaken, she returns again.

Sonnet LXXII.

'BEHOLD how fast Thine arrows stick"—nay, see—
"They that are nearest to me far away :"
Gone is the Light of mine eyes, my Strength, my Stay ;
'I fail for Thy word, when wilt Thou comfort me ?"
When she was here on earth there had to be,
Oh, the long absences, the blank, the grey ;
But then the rapture when she came my way . . .
Love himself, marvelling, paused to watch us—He.
I dream of her upon her flowery bed ;
Her perfume, and the flowers', soothe my pain ;
And then I find the old rimes in my head,
And try to sing as in her life again,
Locking my teeth to choke my sobs : instead,
I keep the songs back too—ah vain ! ah vain !

Sonnet LXXIII.

SORROW and love have thrust me in the way
Of bitter words, that all too mournful come
To her for whom I flame and sing and roam;
And "Great has been my fault," I humbly pray.
For lo! my sorrow goes out with the day,
And her great glory breaks its waves in foam
Upon my heart. How well she is at home
With Him who in her living breast did stay.
All my scars vanish; hushed is my cry;
I would not have her here again, O Fates!
No, no! Far rather, lonely live and die.
How plain I see the sapphire-studded gates,
The vaporous angels coaxing her to fly:
But near the Sacred Feet she sits, and waits.

Sonnet LXXIV.

THE glorious angels, and those blessèd ones
The citizens of Heaven, the first day
My Lady enters there do block her way ;
Marvelling greatly, each to see her runs :
“ What light is this ? And what new beauty suns
Its strangeness here ? ” they to each other say.
Because a thing so gemmed, in such array,
Has never come before. From sext till nones,
Preening herself, content with her new home,
She shines the whitest-burning seraph down ;
But now and then the undazzled eyes will roam,
The bird-bright head will turn, the jewelled gown
Rustle and shimmer like to moonlit foam ;
She waits for me : and, oh, I come—my Crown !

Sonnet LXXV.

LADY, who with the Prince of Peace may go
Full softly, and His wondrous gifts may wear
Of robes and gems mysterious and rare
Beyond the pearls and purple that we know,
When He had throned you, then I know, I know
The very first thing that He brought you there
Was my poor heart : and even as a child doth stare
That holds a watch first to its ear, even so,
The shock of innocent rapture in your eyes,
You looked and wondered why it did not change
Because you were in Heaven. Well you knew
How it had only wanted the sunrise
Of your great guileless eyes, remote and strange.
Stoop, my Belovèd, draw me close to you.

X
Sonnet LXXVI.

THE most transparent face, the loveliest eyes
That ever were, and that most glorious hair
To rival which the great sun did not dare ;
The laugh and voice that silver-fountain-wise
Took all that heard them by a bright surprise ;
The little moon-white feet as soft as air,
And all the body that with tender care
Was once conceived and made in Paradise—
Are the desire of the King of Kings :
And all His wingèd warriors breathless stand
(A thousand times ten thousand mighty cars
Brought to a sudden standstill, rings on rings)
To see him take a little human hand,
And leave slack-reined His awful steeds, the stars.

Sonnet LXXVII.

CLOSER and closer come the golden calls—

My Lady's honied, nerve-convincing note :

How well I know its cadences by rote,
As they come lingering from the jasper walls ;
And all my stoicism, how it falls !

When I look in a mirror—strange, remote,
A face looks out, on whose wan tints I gloat
And say : "How soon now you will deck Death's
halls !"

If I could only know the when, the where,
Of loosing this poor gown, so slight, so frail,
And yet so heavy with mortality,
The when, the where, of leaving my dim jail
The world, and meeting, high up in the air,
My Lord and Lady, who do wait for me !

Sonnet LXXVIII.

Now that the Pentecostal wind doth blow
So often through the alleys of my dreams,
Breathing the freshness of the heavenly streams,
Whose luminous lilies bent to feel it go ;
Less lonely, less bewildered in my woe,
I watch and pray and fast until it seems
As if I might show her my heart ;—what teems
In that most narrow place she might not know
On earth, when that Love bound me, made me dumb :
But when I see her stand stock still and gaze
With drawn white lips, and hear the little groan
That stirs her jewelled vest—then my tears come ;
They scald me wide awake ; for days and days
I hate myself, I scorn myself, I moan.

Sonnet LXXIX.

Is it but twelve bright hours that make the days
And twelve dark hours? For me, since underground
My Lady lies, the clock cannot be found
To measure the vast tedium that weighs
In one long instant. Stiff and silver sways
The asphodel about her: it is wound
In all her vaporous garments, and is bound
On her aerial towers and steep stairways. . . .
Alone the King Death's winepress trod; and food
And wine for me were all His wages: how
Should I be frightened by Death's gesture lewd?
Through every azure vein Death ran but now
Of her who was my life, a torturer rude;
And not a tremour crossed her quiet brow.

Sonnet LXXX.

358

DEATH even cannot shadow that bright face,
But those bright eyes irradiate his dim crown ;
What other torchlight need I to go down
The awful brink of that ambiguous place ?
And who is this that yearns to my embrace,
And shows, to try to comfort me, the brown
Arms of His Cross—His blood that like a gown
Masks all His Godhead from the Angelic race ?
His heavenly footfall felled the Tartarus gate ;
Therefore come, Death ; thy coming will be dear ;
Do not hang back, for it is time to go.
Now she is gone, you know I cannot wait ;
My soul is in her footprints ; they are clear
And wind straight downward to the Shades below.

Canzone VI.

354

WHEN my most constant comforter and stay,
To heal my weary heart that long has bled,
Sits down upon the left side of my bed
And talks to me in the old dear tranquil way ;
White with great awe and yearning, low I say :
“ Whence comest thou now, O happy soul so calm ? ”
A little bough of palm,
And a laurel bough, she draws from her soft breast,
And says : “ Upon this quest
I have left the gardens of the heavenly lands :
Only to comfort thee and touch thy hands.”

I thank her with a gesture and a word
Humbly, and say : “ O heavenly sweet and wise,
How knowest thou my state ? ” and she replies :
“ The moan of thy insatiate heart is heard,
It beats through infinite spaces like a bird,
Flutters through Heaven, and troubles all my peace.
Nay, griev’st thou that I cease
To have a portion in that sorry strife,
Being rapt into real life ?
Thou wouldst be happy if thou lovedst me true,
As in all looks and words thou seemst to do.”

“ I wanted so to ask,” I answer then,
“ What was the meaning of those two green boughs.”
And she : “ The one to which thy love allows
All honour answers thee by thine own pen.

The palm is victory ; I was a child still when,
Vanquishing the world and self in difficult fight,
I proved to both my right,
Through mercy of that Lord who gave me force.
Do thou too have recourse
To Him, if ever thou art near to fall,
So we may both be with Him after all."

"Is this the golden knot, this the blond head,"
I ask, "which still constrain my heart? Are these
The lovely eyes that were my sun?" "Nay, please,
Be not blind with the blind," she, faintly red ;
"Nor think their thoughts. For dust, ay me, long dead
Is what thou seest ; I an immortal thing.
This semblance I do bring
To comfort thee : but thou some day shalt see
How lovelier she can be,
And dearer even, who, once by love made bold,
To save thy soul and hers seemed dumb and cold."

I answer : "I mourn only my hard fate,
Who here remain in torture of black night,
As certain always of thy heavenward flight
As of a thing I have seen within my gate.
For how should Nature's God and Nature freight
A girl's young heart with such stupendous dower,
If the Eternal Power
Had not been set on seeing her reach that goal?
Ah me, thou rarest soul,
Thou didst pause here to strike our souls awake,
And then such sudden flight to Heaven didst take !

“ But I, what should I do but ever weep,
Who without thee am nothing ? Ah, I would
That I had died a tiny child, who could
Have passed without a love-wound to his sleep ! ”
And she : “ Why dost thou stir thy soul so deep ?
Wiser it were to raise from earth thy wings ;
And weighing mortal things,
And woes of thy sweet phantom-earnest tales,
In better balanced scales,
To follow me, if that thou lov’st me so ;
Gathering these boughs for ever where they grow ! ”

I weep ; and she my tears
With her own hands does stay : and then she sighs
Softly, and then she cries
Remonstrance that would make the stones to weep :
And after that she goes away, with Sleep.

Canzone VII.

380

THAT sweet and terrible lord of my life
I cited to appear in the quiet halls
Within whose cells and walls
The only real last judgment is proclaimed.
Reason was thronèd there, whose verdict falls
In clear analysis on Doubt and Strife
And slays them like a knife,
And Insincerity and Fear ill-famed.
And I began : "Madonna, I am named
Francesco, and when I was still a boy
I entered, full of joy,
Into the service of this cruel Lord,
Who slights and scorn has poured
And tortures on me, his disdainèd clout,
Till even my infinite patience is worn out.

"Thus has my life up to this hour been spent
In misery ; and, alas, I have passed by
The music and the cry
From all the windows of this lovely world
Where Beauty lays her table, without a sigh,
Only on faithful service being intent ;
And, for emolument,
Into what hollow has my heart been hurled
Where wormlike sorrows are wound in and curled
So close, ah, I cannot put them into words !
And, oh, like twilight birds
The sweet false things he told me come to me
And I the talons see

Under their downy breasts. O words! O doves
Of Nazareth, that were my earlier loves!

“Madonna, he did drug me so that I
Forgot even God; and for a golden head
I was as one long dead,
Who walks the world again and does not know
One single face—a thing unhallowèd.
And ever did he loose when I was by,
With low exultant cry,
Great irised hopes—ah, woe is me! ah, woe!
And where my will went God alone doth know—
My subtle intuition, my clear thought,
My high aims, crystal wrought
In white simplicity of childish days—
And, oh, my deathless bays!
The parched leaves cracked and withered, sighing down.
I had forgot even my laurel crown.

“He hath made me know all deserted places,
And live with human beasts, a plundering horde
That know not Christ our Lord,
The while my heart grew heavy in my breast.
Jagged mountain, haunted vale, and screaming ford,
Where the hail and rain come down, and the ice races,
And Oriental faces
(Suave nightmares that my maddened mind oppressed)—
These were my wage, my bed, my board, my rest!
And all the while the gold head followed me
Through the mock novelty
Of all my strangest thoughts and these strange sights.
In vain, in vain, one fights

Where all is old. Christ came and took my part,
Else had he utterly drained my poor heart.

“Since I am his, tranquillity has fled
And never will come back ; and, gentle Sleep,
You know what watch I keep,
What incantations and what drowsy thing
In vain I use, and call on you and weep.
For he has bound his colours round my head :
I lie in a sleepless bed
No matter where I end my journeying,
Country or town, and hear the Angelus ring.
I cannot, as of old time, make my songs
Out of unpeace and wrongs,
Out of my bitterness, though I grow faint
In trying—O my Saint,
Is it not time my suit should ended be?
Judge, then, Madonna—thou knowest him and me.”

Then, shaking his bright head, that angry Lord
Began : “O Lady, hear now my defence,
And know my innocence
This man impugns. Lady, my name is Love.
This my accuser, when by thought and sense
He first was stirred, would dreaming sit and hoard
His baby visions, pored
All day on rhymes, while, wheeling far above,
I hung and watched him like a brooding dove.
I won him later from his formless dreams,
And now, forsooth, it seems
He murmurs, shameless, that I forced his feet
Into my Eden sweet—

Where seraphs, welcoming him, let down the bars,
And put him to my school beyond the stars.

“He knows what bounty was Achilles’ fate,
And Hannibal’s, who in the very place
He loathed most saw a face,
A slave-girl face, that smote him to the heart.
I let the heroes of the human race,
As their bad horoscopes had ordered, mate ;
I left them all to wait
For this man here, to give him as his part
So fair a lady that the moon shall start
And tremble and fade out before one glide
Like her in that white tide—
E’en though Lucretia came there moony-white
From Heaven’s highest height.
Thus was he ‘ambushed,’ ‘trapped,’ and all the rest
Because I drew him to that glorious breast.

“Words I had captured singing in Heaven’s wild
I gave him then—a whole new language, brought
In my light net—and sought
To steal the tablets that the Wingèd hold :
‘He’ll learn their theory of song,’ I thought ;
‘By no dim carnal things shall be defiled
Thy song, celestial child !’
And then to many courts and castles old
We journeyed till his story had been told
And his young voice loosed out on the world’s air ;
And monarchs everywhere
Kneel to him now, who, but for my ‘deceits,’
Had stayed on with Conceits,

And bloodless Rhetoric, and Pedantry,
Contented—thought them the best company !

“ And, coming to the root of things, God knows
From what ambiguous deeds I've drawn him back
Simply because the rack
Could not have forced him near ignoble things,
So high-fastidious he had grown, alack !—
So sensitively chaste, so world-shy, grows,
Intolerant of prose,
My liege man in the shelter of my wings.
Nay, all that fugitive and wistful sings
Within his verse he got from her and me.
Never a child did see
Nocturnal terrors so fantastical
As are these charges all.
Though we have led him to the newer heights,
He has grown proud, and raves of wrongs and rights.

“ And then (this thought is bitterest of all)
I gave him wings to reach the golden void
And there, undaunted, buoyed,
Where all things else but God must cease, to hymn
The unfathomable wonders—and decoyed
Even his Lady to the jasper wall.
And when he heard my call
He turned his head where the wings float and skim :
“ Thy Lady, see how much she is like Him ! ”
I cried and cried again ; but, as I live,
He raves at all I give,
And even upon that Lady—” With a shriek
I sobbed : “ How dare you speak

Of *giving*?—you that carried her away!
He said: “I am of those who but obey.”

We both turn pleading eyes upon the Judge;
I trembling, low-voiced, he secure and high,
Each for himself doth cry:

“Settle it out according to the book!”

But she, with baffling look:

“The court adjourns for thought—somewhat in awe
Of such high-spiritual points of law.”

Sonnet LXXXI.

361

Across my silver mirror cries to me—
As God across the silver summer skies
In secret places of the thunder cries—
A voice: "Wake! Look, how unlike others! See,
The hours you brooded on what could not be,
The wakeful nights you went with aching eyes,
Have branded you, each after its own guise,
While all your life flowed by you noiselessly."
This rouseth me as water doth a flame,
And then I note the spinning of Time's wheel
Which, ended once, endeth the whole poor game:
And in delirium my heart doth wheel
Back to one strange day when my Lady came
And told me something speech shall never steal.

Sonnet LXXXII. 362

BEING almost always now in that far place,
It seems at times that I might almost stay ;
They are so used to have me in their way,
They do not mind it. In her last embrace
Last night I cried : " Lord, grant me this one grace :
Cut the long years that I must live away,
In all things else I will Thy will obey."
Then, oh, what silvery laughter ! What a race
From close to close ! " Come, hear the mortal speak !"
But, drawing a great jewel from her hair,
My Lady said : " Look in—and understand."
There I knew all and, dazed with rapture, weak,
I looked up from her face to His—aware
Of the whole structure of that curious land.

Sonnet LXXXIII.

362

Now Death has flung my Sun down from the sky,
And drawn the final dark across those eyes;
And that white body in the churchyard lies
Which I knew breath and warmth and coldness by :
Since that those senses too, they say, can die,
Through which I knew the world magicianwise,
In every nerve and fibre my life cries :
“ Annihilate me quickly ! Quench this I—
This dreadful simulacrum, nightmare thing,
Which impiously plays at being alive.
Suffer it not—some sudden ending bring,
O Cause of Things ! Unknown ! Thou which dost
strive
Through all this vast creation, travailing,
And wast ‘ God ’ to me through her senses five.”

Sonnet LXXXIV.

O LORD! Thou who didst lock me in that cell
A woman's hand, behold, O Lord, and see
What an immense despair bewilders me,
Thrust forth to freedom when the prison fell.
I did not murmur; I loved passing well
Those walls, rose, violet and ivory,
Pulsating with a music heavenly
Too awful for my human speech to tell:
But now come closer: who was it that spoke—
When some one cried: "That I may see, Lord!"—
words
Sweeter than spikenard when the box was broke?
Keep me close to Thee when my anguish wrings:
The glass wherein I saw Thee being broke,
I rise to Thee on fierce instinctive wings.

Sonnet LXXXV.



You'LL come at last to my great feasting place,
Then when your hair is whiter than the curd,
All my quick dreams, gold-clad and ermine-
furred,

Shall move in strange stiff figures like old lace ;
My awful warriors shall fill all space

(I spoke quite low : alas ! Death overheard),

My myriad Desires, mailed and spurred,
And lift their lances when they see your face :

And all the while, on slow ethereal wings,

From sweet, remote, cold places in the air,

My kisses will come floating down, and rest—

Some on your hands, among your great-eyed rings,

Some at your feet, some on your carven chair ;

And a slow sigh will stir your quiet breast.

The Poet is
exulting in the
hope of the time
when, his Lady's
hair being white,
he shall be able to
show her all his
heart, but Death
overhearing be-
comes jealous and
takes her.

Sonnet LXXXVI.

SOFT hardnesses, and tranquil cold replies,
Full of proud love and full of pity ; still,
Charming disdains, which my inflamèd will
Tempered and urged to white heat ; fervours wise ;
Grave manners, that the rosiest Loves did prize
And purity thrice-bolted did fulfil :
Beauty and Sainthood thronèd on one hill
Where all the incense of the world did rise.
O slim hand, firm upon the cruel curb
That reined my poor thoughts in ! O silken hand,
Healing my faint heart like a magic herb ;
Magnetic, subtle, quick to understand !—
These lovely paradoxes did disturb
Yet save my soul, which they put out and fanned.

Sonnet LXXXVII.

ALAS ! my brain is clamorous to-night
With what you said that day in the deep dell
Where, in the grass and violets, voluble
As some gay seraph flying a meteor kite,
You seemed scarce human to my dazed sight,
And in your flesh your soul was visible,
And Youth and Spring ran in your veins : ah, well !
I know that what you do is always right ;
But, when you heard Our Lord had sent for you,
To leave all in the earth, forgot, cast by,
That rosy veil your flesh abandoning—
Dear, when you left the earth love left it too,
And courtesy ; the sun fell from the sky ;
And death began to seem a friendly thing.

Sonnet LXXXVIII.

ÆNEAS sent Achates to the ships
To fetch a child to Dido's golden feast :
O Love, my master, look on me, the least
Of all thy servants ! Help my stammering lips !
My Lady's voice, it rises up and dips,
Teaching the seraphs human speech : they ceased
From all their questing—north, south, west, and east—
To hear the voice that is their own eclipse,
Predominant in heaven, lord of their Lord.
A fountain sobbing in a far-off place—
My Lady's voice ! Ah, Love, how shall we say
The whole of her ? How show the world our prize ?
Then Love : "Nay, courage ! Heed in my embrace
What I shall whisper. And thereon he sighs."

Sonnet LXXXIX.

O LOVELY little bird, so heavenly gay
You singing go, and then so mournful sweet !
Dawn in a rosy tide broke at our feet ;
But, oh, the twilight fields are very grey !
If I but knew a literal, soft way
Like yours for telling of old wounds that beat,
And sobs that I remember and repeat,
Straight to my breast you would come and, piteous, say :
" Doth not our plaining stir the stones ? " And still
We share unlike ; may be she is but late :
A bruised wing, perhaps, mourn if you will,
But do not doubt she comes. O Twilight !—gate
Wide open for the things Time cannot kill—
The phantom Things that by the fences wait !

Sonnet XC.

THE lovely Lady that we lovèd so,
Full suddenly, Gherardo, 's gone away,
And is in Heaven, so I hear them say.
With words and deeds like hers, where should
she go?

Was she not gentle as a woodland doe?
Was she not sweeter than the heart of May?
And now your flesh and spirit, from her sway
Being thus untimely freed, must strive to know
To walk alone. Before her footprints fade
Make ready for the journey: take the chart
She showed you, saying: "It will lead you
right."

Throw all your goods aside. Alas, take heart!
Now she and Love are gone, be not afraid
To cast all else aside and travel light.

To his brother
Gherardo, who
afterwards, on
account of the
Lady's death,
retired to a
monastery.

Canzone VIII.

(366)

O LOVELY Virgin who, soft-clothed in sun,
With waving hair thick-woven and crowned with stars,
Moved that great Sun to hide in you His light !
Love burns in me, forcing my pen that mars
Your perfectness with words ; but have I won
Your leave, and His who sheathed in you His might ?
(I call on her as though I had a right !)
Far in the eternal city,
O Virgin, if in pity
The extreme anguish of our human plight
Drown ever your deep eyes, bend to my cry,
Help in this mortal strife ;
Though I am dust, you Queen of Heaven so high.

Wise Virgin ! Sure the first of the bright group
Of vigilant virgins whose hearts never sleep ;
Even the first, and with the brightest flame ;
A magic breastplate tired hearts to keep
Who under lash of death and fortune stoop—
To keep and bring to triumph. Will you tame
And still, O Snow Maid, the fierce things that
 maim
Our souls, which else might rise ?
Virgin, whose wondrous eyes
Looked on those men—who knew they hurrying came
To pierce the thin palms of your dearest Son—
Turn to me in my doubt,
Who other counsellor than you have none.

O Virgin pure and most inviolate !
O House of Gold ! St. Jerome's " Sea Spray Wild " !
Garden Enclosed ! Celestial pale Decoy !
Your Son and the great Father's, Undeiled,
Window of Heaven open early and late,
Through you, to save, came down, a fragile boy—
In all the world would only you employ,
O Lady, as resting place.
Virgin, whose girlish face
Smiled on Eve's tears and turned them into joy !
Make me, if I can, answer all your graces,
O Blessed for ever and ever,
Crowned Queen and Empress of the supernal places !

O moving Vision ! O soft rosy Flame,
From your humility's low dazzling deep
Springing to Heaven, where you hear my rime !
You are the source whence pity's floods did creep,
From your soft dawn came freedom and desire
Of freedom ; and the shadows fled from time.
Three dearest names in one for you we chime—
Mother and Daughter and Spouse.
Virgin, whose glorious brows
Bear the King's crown—who healèd with sublime
And tender craft our wounds in His own way !
Within His holy wounds
Hide deep, O Blessed One, my heart, I pray.

You stand for ever alone, O Virgin Spouse !
Virgin with child—fair marvel exquisite ;
Who fevered Heaven with desires three ;
Whose pitiful pure thoughts, so holy white,

Shone like soft torches in God's crystal house,
Your virginal body,—bend down pityingly,
And let my desert like a garden be.
Nay, then, how should I speak,
I, inconsistent, weak?—
There's nothing fit for your clear eyes in me.
Yet, oh, I thirst, and I am desolate!
Give me my joy again:
I ask a miracle, but you are great.

Consider, Sea Star, peaceful, starry-still,
Watching the rhythmic glories of the sky
That come and go like dreams about a bed,—
Did not my Lady sicken, and then die,
And shatter all my courage and my will?—
I who had always mixed, when all is said,
Some poppies with the laurel on my head.
But, oh, for years and years
To know the silent tears
That fall within, and shall till I am dead!
Think, Sea Star, Ivory Tower, All Heaven's Gate—
Because of human sin
God took a little Syrian girl to mate.

Then pity my dark monotone of years!
Bend down, O Virgin, pityingly, and look—
In spite of all my infidelity
Since first the sound of rushing Arno struck
My imagination waking. No man fears
To ask a favour of the hand that He
Held with His dimpled hand when timidly
He tried to learn to walk.
Nay, nay, we will not talk

Of where His feet walked later—to what tree ;
And, oh, do not be long, for there is Death,
And I'm joy-hungry—joy-starved :
Did you not pour his milk at Nazareth ?

Virgin, it is so long since Laura died !
And when she was on earth my Ecstasy
Ate at one board and shared her loaf with Pain ;
For though my verses murmured like the sea,
Tide in tide out, and rippled at her side,
And though I tried again and yet again,
She would turn from me—she would droop and wane.
I think my infinite dream
And infinite woe did seem
Strange and remote to her. But you, oh, deign
To lend your glorious, exalted senses !
Unhood my falcon heart,
You who know all before the song commences.

And when, O Virgin, I shall come to die,
Remember that the poet is but a child,
And hush me with the little drowsy song
That soothed Him when His eyes with dreams were wild
And the vague mystery of the night was by.
He was a frightened child . . . nay, your eyes throng
With memories . . . and let it not be long,
The drowsiness ; but croon,
And bring deep slumber soon.
And now it seems to me—oh, is it wrong—
I feel your tears fall on my tired head.
Laura-Medusa, see !
The blood you turned to stone is warm, is red.

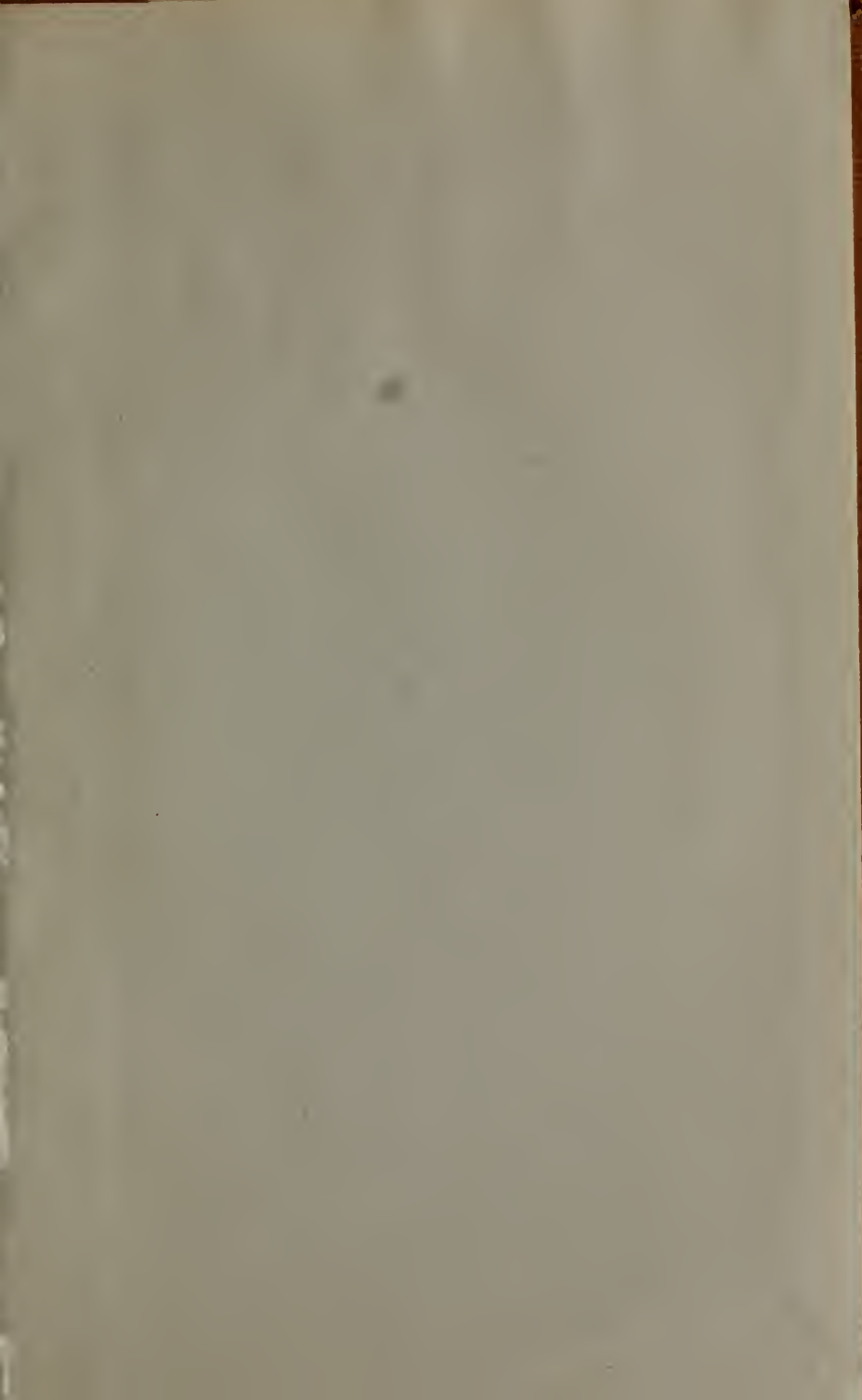
O Virgin, you were human, mortal, near,
Cleaving to earth in your humility :
Have pity on this sentient heart, and wake
And make it yours ; you know, and you did see
How it could hold a mortal woman dear.
Think, O you lovely thing, for your white sake
What it will do—what fastness it will take.
So, Virgin, bless my arms,
And keep me from all harms ;
And I will serve you sleeping and awake :
Bless my poor weapons—all my rimes and stresses,
My strong fourteen-fold shield,
My lithe canzoni strung with your bright tresses.

And when I fall, seeing I wear your sleeve,
Succour me, Holy One,
Sun that outshines the sun !
Permit not that I faint alone and grieve.
Commend me to your Son that, when I cease
To breathe this air, He may,
True God and Man, plunge deep my soul in peace.

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